

Mc. Ball. (John)

Vol.

box 14.

NEEDS, DUTIES AND PRIVILEGES
OF THE
MEDICAL PROFESSION.

BY JOHN McCALL, M. D., UTICA, N. Y.

Read before the New York State Medical Society at its annual meeting held in the City of Albany Feb. 1853. Published in its Transactions.

Needs, Duties and Privileges of the Medical Profession.

✓ —
BY JOHN MCCALL, M. D., UTICA, N. Y.
—

Mr. President and Gentlemen:

8496

It is well for those in pursuit of positive knowledge,—desirous of understanding the principles and duties pertaining to their vocation, to take, occasionally a retrospective survey of the same, in order to ascertain whether, or not, they have attained, to a commendable degree, the great object and purpose of their individual and united labors.

Thus as scientific enquirers seeking true and useful knowledge of the noble and responsible, yet often abused and ill-requested profession of medicine, let us *now glance* at some of its aspects.

And first, of man, said to have been made in the likeness or image of the Divinity: “un nouveau grand etre,” in the language of Mon. Auguste Comte.

Let us survey man's whole nature and developments; his powers and faculties of whatever name or character, whether of mind or body, in health or disease.

These are matters in which the physician should be well skilled and instructed. Indeed everything respecting his organization from the moment of conception to the last respiratory movement, and all external objects with which he is surrounded, or in any way connected, properly belong to the medical profession, as things to be best known and understood by its members.

A knowledge of anatomy, physiology, therapeutics, the laws of health and hereditary descent, is all important for the physician to enable him to discharge well the duties of his high vocation.

With such diverse and complicated materials in the groundwork and superstructure of man, what should be our conception of the medical profession? Let us see:—

Notwithstanding the great attainments in anatomical science, something more of positivity, I think, is needed in respect to the brain and nervous tissues.

Slicing the masses of the former, as I understand is sometimes the practice in a few of the medical schools, and too often followed by practitioners not connected with those most useful institutions, will do but little, I fear, in revealing the natural texture or true structure and use of the cerebral and nervous tissues.

If other organs had been so treated, the amount of positive knowledge, as to structure or function, would have been small indeed. Moreover, a few of the anatomical terms like the word *artery*, seem to me to be absurd and unscientific.

Artery implies, or literally means an air vessel; and as little or no blood was, or is usually found therein after death, an idea obtained generally among the metaphysicians that the arteries circulated air, or the animal spirits. It will be remembered that many of the ancients, like most of our modern spiritualists were believers in spirits and spiritualism. And not until Dr. Harvey's grand discovery of the circulation of the blood in 1619, (an achievement by which, strange as the result may seem, his large practice and good character were nearly ruined,) was the physiological mistake as to the use of the arteries, fully disproved and rejected.

Again as to the functions of the cerebrum and cerebellum, there is yet a want of more positive knowledge before we can come to any sound and correct philosophy of mind and its manifestations through its material organ, the brain, as I understand the subject.

The metaphysical hypothesis that the brain is the seat and not the organ of mind, and that the mind is immaterial, spiritual or incorporeal, without an attribute of materiality, yet doing all the labor of thinking and feeling, and that too independently of the material brain, is a doctrine still spoken of as true, if not really endorsed or believed by physicians.

Medical men yet talk of unsoundness of mind; its being crazed, lost or demented; and not only subject to disease like the body,

but, singular enough, I think unkind too on the part of the mind, that it inflicts upon the brain and body sundry disorders and ailments. Mais nous verrons.

Some may perhaps say that this is all figurative; but I ask whether medical men seeking truth are thus to deal in tropes and figures?

A physician read, not long since, an elaborate discourse before a medical association, in which he strenuously maintained the following singular and metaphysical view of the matter. He presented for the consideration and action of that body, and it in its wisdom, entertained this notable resolution:

“As the influence of the mind upon the body in the production of disordered function and disease, *opens* a wide field for useful improvement in the treatment of the various cases submitted to the physician; therefore,

“*Resolved*, That two or more persons, members of the society, be appointed to bring forward written communications to this society, on this subject.”

The society accordingly appointed two of its members for that purpose,—the mover and another; and this metaphysical view of the operations of the incorporeal and immaterial mind was thus gravely discussed affirmatively by one, and negatively by another member, less skilled, but more sceptical in metaphysical speculations.

And such I suppose to be still the orthodox doctrine on this subject, while all of us address our means of medication to the human organism, not yet knowing whether the mind, per se, is ever affected by any agents found, or used in the whole *materia medica*.

Now, although I have no disposition to occupy the time in discussing fully this grave subject, truth and common sense require that I should say a word more as to the brain being thus used by the mind merely as a seat.

May I ask whether an immaterial thing, which the mind is said to be, can require or occupy a seat? Or can it, as Dr. Barclay of Edinburgh maintained, form and fashion the cerebral organs?

What is the function performed by the anterior lobes of the cerebrum? What of the middle, or lateral portions thereof?

Do the posterior ones think or feel, or are they all useless, and serve no other purpose than to fill up the cavity of the skull?

These are legitimate and physiological inquiries, and hence I hope no apology need be made in thus propounding them. My desire is to know truth, and thus, if possible, avoid error, which is worse, if not more dangerous, than ignorance.

With ignorance there is hope of enlightenment, but little or none with wilful error.

If there be any other solution of this subject than that afforded by a knowledge of the physiology and pathology of the brain, I should be glad to know it, and would thank any one for this much desired information.

It is pleasing and most gratifying to our self-esteem to know that medicine is now regarded as a science. That term or word, is French, and comes from the Latin *scientia*, and that again from the verb *scio*, to know.

We indeed know more and understand better all the branches and principles of our profession, than the renowned Drs. Boerhaave, Hoffman, Sydenham, Cullen, Brown, Darwin, Dessault, Rush, and many others did in their day.

Still, human nature and its developments, the laws of health and hereditary descent, as well as the best plan of treating some of our worst diseases, are matters yet requiring more consideration and light to enable us to fulfil the duties pertaining to the medical philanthropist. Now, mathematics and astronomy are truly sciences, in the strict sense of the term. I wish we could say that our profession was so in most of its aspects and present condition. It is, however, true and highly encouraging to know that there is much of positivity belonging to medicine; and that

by the impelling power of order and fixedness of purpose, our course will be onward, until progress—the great law of nature—shall accomplish its mission in our world.

What is so charming as the discovery of scientific truth ? I shall never forget the feelings of pride and satisfaction I felt at the prediction of the eclipse of the sun in May last. By the use of the sense of sight, in taking cognizance of physical phenomena, and the aid of telescopes in the examination of two sets of phenomena, those of form or figure and of motion ; and the instrumentality of mathematical calculations, astronomy has long since become a positive science. My delight on the occasion of that eclipse was such as I had never before experienced ; although I had witnessed similar phenomena several times within the last half century. Yet, my friends, I felt at the time some mortification, because we have not always been able to predict as correctly the pathological condition of certain organs, or foresee the effects for good or for evil, of all the means advised and used in our treatment of diseases. Whether the other two learned professions experienced like emotions I cannot say, or what amount of positivity is justly claimed by either of these, I know not. The uncertainty of the law, as I understand it, is an important element in the glorification of one of them—a singular subject of glory for thinking, reasoning men !

Of the other, venerable profession, with its popular theology and orthodox religion, I can only refer its friends and others desirous of knowing the truth, or at least what is said pertaining thereto, to my friend Mr. Theodore Parker, in his late work entitled “Sermons of Theism.” By the by, the world has been long studying theology and metaphysics, and what fruits have been gathered by its labors ? Physics, first, I would advise, and when men know and understand that mighty subject, in all its departments, then they may attempt to learn, if they can, all that pertains to metaphysics.

Now, to obtain positive knowledge, we must see and have the objects, and employ thereon all our powers of thought and reflection. Patient thought was the motto and rule of conduct with Sir Isaac Newton. Order and progress are nature’s mighty engines

o move the world. By the same agency, medicine has been steadily advancing onward in all its departments. What changes in this respect have fallen within my observation since I began the study of my profession ! It is a fact no less true than fortunate, that our practice and plans of treatment now vary considerably from those pursued by our venerable and illustrious forefathers, and will continue thus, for the reason that the character of diseases has changed since their day, and probably will continue to change.

With our enlightenment on the great subject as to what are the powers of the human economy, in health and disease, and how far these are to be trusted to nature or medicines, in most cases of abnormalism, if I may be allowed such a term, I think but few of us would now readily follow the advice of Dr. Rush, as to the importance or benefit of bleeding, so strongly advocated in his famous article on blood-letting; nor would we give as liberally as he did his cathartic of cal. grs. 10, and Jalap grs. 10 to 20.

And here, gents, let me caution you to keep down your wonder, for we, too, have an ample supply thereof, while I assure you that it is now just fourteen years this month since I have bled a patient by the arm, or abstracted blood, in any way, except in a few instances by cupping and leeching. The good people of Utica have no blood to loose, except in the service of their country ; and I trust no such occasion will occur in my day.

Although I have previously spoken on this subject, still I think it advisable to embrace this opportunity to declare my opinion as to the bad effects, in certain cases, of such practice.

I was often told by my good friend, the late Dr. Brigham, and lately assured by the present Physician and Superintendent of our New York State Lunatic Asylum, that many patients brought to that excellent Institution had been much injured by bleeding and other reducing means, before their admission into said Asylum. I am assured that in several of these cases, dementia resulted as a consequence of such injudicious practice.

If time and the occasion permitted, I should like to speak of other matters touching certain things in our method and means of treating some of the diseases of the day ; for I have no doubt, much hidden treasure, in the line of medicines, yet remains to be discovered, for the healing of the people, and the honor of our profession ; but as in digestion, respiration, thought and feeling, each one must "read, mark and inwardly digest," so in this matter, each member must observe, think, and try for himself, and take nothing on trust. There should be no guessing in medicine ; for it is a science and an art, so far as each rests on observation and experiment, and not on assumption.

Fortunately for the cause of truth, men are now, in a measure, ceasing to speculate on first and final causes ; because these things are beyond our comprehension. Such misspent time and waste of thought are no longer becoming our profession ; and I am glad to be able to say that its members, generally, now seek for facts, and speak and act more fearlessly than formerly in their investigations after truth, believing that its attainment will save them from danger and error.

A heathen Governor once asked a young and lovely teacher of morals, the question, "What is truth?" The interrogatory seems to me to have been quite reasonable. And I have often thought it would be well to ask ourselves, now and then, the question, what is medical truth ? I confess I have often been unable to answer the same interrogatory when applied to myself.

It seems to me we really need more and better works on the philosophy of man and medicine. In the mean time, I take occasion to say that I have derived both instruction and pleasure from the perusal of Mills' Logic ; that, and Comte's Positive Philosophy, have afforded me much useful knowledge of man, and his progressive state, and his relation with external nature. I think we are in want of a new work on medical logic.

But, Gentlemen, I must speak of the law of hereditary descent ; a subject too much overlooked, though of vast importance, involving the health, welfare, and life of many of our race. From generation to generation certain family diseases appear and sweep

off many promising and lovely members thereof, before attaining full maturity. Such cases occur too often in our own families. Now, it seems to me, that such fatality ought not to happen so frequently, and that medical men, in bad health, should never marry ; at all events, they should give a better example than that of marrying such women as are known to be in bad health, or pre-disposed to consumption, insanity, epilepsy, or some other vicious tendency, or bad inheritance. But the theory and teachings in medicine, are too often like those of another profession, excellent and beautiful ; though the practice may not always commend itself to our experience and better judgment.

He who studies and obeys, in all things, the laws of his own nature, will best secure his own health, prosperity and happiness. Now the law, of which I am speaking, as you all know, transmits from parents to children, certain qualities of mind, as well as certain diseases. Pulmonary consumption, insanity, stone in the bladder, intemperance, with its baneful consequences, and sundry other ailments and diseases, are some of the vicious inheritances from the violation of the laws of health ; and neither prayers nor religious belief, nor unwearied attention and rigid devotion to all the services of the church will suspend one of nature's laws. This is just as divine wisdom and justice should govern the world. Were it otherwise, man could never know how to conform his conduct ; for were the laws of nature to be, every now and then, suspended or altered, there would be an end in the world to order and progress.

Now let me urge those, unacquainted with the writings of Drs. Gall, Spurzheim, Combe, and Mr. Geo. Combe, as touching this great subject, if there be any such here, " to read, mark and inwardly digest " their doctrines on this important matter. The farmer now knows the necessity of good seed, as well as good culture to ensure good crops ; and that the improvement in the breed of his " live stock " requires the greatest care in selecting well-formed and healthy breeders. *Qu'en pensez vous, mes amis ?*

It was well said by that eminent Philosopher, Dr. Spurzheim, in his remarks on this subject to some of his friends in Boston :

"Gentlemen, you seem to take great care and pains for the improvement of your stock of cattle ; but, it seems to me, you often disregard the laws of health and hereditary descent so necessary in the improvement and prosperity of your own families and race."

Immortal Spurzheim !

" Priest of nature ! how true and fervent was thy worship at her shrine,
Friend of man, of God the servant, advocate of truths divine."

As population was the great idea of the Jewish nation, so with us in America ; our western hemisphere should and *must* be peopled with strong and vigorous inhabitants ; hence to that end, let there be no marrying " in and in," out and out, and with those only, who have large and well developed heads, and good constitutions, should be the rule for the improvement of the race. Such, too, should be the precept and example of the members of our profession. To them is assigned a great work ; the regeneration of the race. With their enlightenment there is but little excuse for any considerable share of ignorance or error in medical practice, or the true philosophy of medicine.

Order and progress, under the guidance of positive knowledge, are destined to elevate man to the true dignity of philosophical manhood.

Among the Greeks there was a saying, "Thaumata morois"—"Miracles for fools!" And with the Romans, "Vulgus vult decipi ; decipiatur" "The common people like to be deceived ; deceived let them be !" But our sense of professional obligation requires us to know and understand our duty, and do it faithfully and fearlessly ; and that sacred trust is not shut up in a thimble, or the small compass of merely prescribing medicines for the sick. Its functions and sympathies are as wide and extensive as the universe of man. It is the duty of the medical philosopher to give the people useful information, and sound, practical knowledge, of whatever relates to health or disease, both of mind and body ; though I have no evidence that the first is ever, *per se*, sick or diseased.

The great subjects of sociology and the religion of humanity are objects in which the physician should be "posted up" and expected to speak understandingly, in language freed from the mists and fictions which have too long bewildered the human mind.

Mankind seem to be starving for the Bread of Knowledge, of themselves and the world around them.

With this attainment, and a careful observance of the laws of health and hereditary descent, the human family would, in my opinion, not only improve in all respects, but secure its own earthly immortality. I firmly believe the race of man is destined to live on earth forever, and to make this beautiful world a Heaven indeed.

I am fully aware that some good people, and even excellent physicians, think that a medical man should never speak of theology or religion. Respecting the latter subject, I answer in the language of Lord Archbishop Whateley, one of the most distinguished divines and scientific men of the day: "Is our religion founded on sand, or a rock? Or is it so brittle as not to bear touching?"

Now, as to the exclusive claims of another venerable profession, as to the matter of theology, I may remark that if it be true, as written and maintained, that the Divinity made man in his own likeness, and that no one hath or can see Him, then it is clear to my mind that the only method of studying the Divine character and will is that of investigating the economy and nature of man, and his relations with the external world; and that the physician who is well acquainted with human nature, in all its relations, should be the best theologian.

Is not this sentiment a sound and logical deduction from the premises afforded by popular theology?

It seems to me the philosophical physician owes it to himself, and the dignity of his vocation, not only to know and understand this whole matter, but to teach and give the people advice and

knowledge on all subjects, in this life, connected with their health, prosperity, welfare and happiness.

Another great subject is that of education, which consists of instruction and training. This, too, should be under the domain of medicine. Others may speak of cultivating and improving the mind, irrespective of the state or condition of the material brain.

But the enlightened physiologist knows that the encephalon does all the labor in mental manifestations, and that these will hold a certain relation to the size, health, and condition of the material brain. Gentlemen, this is truth, though opposed by the philosophy of ages.

Cerebral physiology has engaged my attention for more than thirty years, and truth obliges me to say that I have derived much light from phrenology respecting the great subject of mental philosophy. I am satisfied from a course of rigid observation made on that subject, that the great doctrines taught by Drs. Gall, Spurzheim, Combe, and Mr. George Combe are, in the main, true; and when the principles of the new philosophy shall be known and understood, the world will then, and not before, have a sound and scientific system of mental philosophy. Man, then, will be studied in all his relations, as a domestic, social, moral, religious, and intellectual being, possessing organs the functions of which enable him to fulfil the great purpose of his organization. Then his true nature will be no longer regarded as a riddle, but his physical powers and mental faculties will be studied with the same ease and certainty as the positive sciences, and rendered as amenable to the laws and rules of reason, as anything in Mr. Mill's excellent system of logic.

But to return. The medical missionary has yet much work on hand. Behold the degeneration among our people, as to physical development, and mental vigor!

In the city where I have resided nearly thirty-seven years, I have been particularly struck with this state of things; and what is worthy of remark is the fact that many of the young men

and maidens who flock there on certain occasions, from the several towns in the county, are thin, pale, and feeble, in comparison with their parents, and certainly not as stout and healthy as others of their age were when I first settled in Utica.

"Mens sana in corpore sano," is a truth which cannot be too frequently urged upon mankind.

I have thus, gentlemen, attempted to give you my views and sentiments relative to some of the needs, duties, and privileges, pertaining to our profession.

Its members, it seems to me, should be philosophers and philanthropists. My conception of medicine, as an art and a science, is something more and far greater than that usually accorded to it by the world. I cannot conceive of a more useful and honorable vocation than ours; and, if we were true to ourselves, and appreciated justly the great purposes and object of medicine, our noble profession could not fail of ensuring to us our highest and noblest wishes and expectations.

But I must conclude with remarking that I shall now be satisfied if I have succeeded in making myself understood, or if my observations in behalf of the profession should serve the same purpose that the advice did which was given by the old man in the fable, to his sons, on his death-bed—that a treasure was hidden in his vineyard. Immediately after his death, they began to dig over the whole ground in search of it, but found no treasure; yet the loosening of the soil, the removal and destruction of the weeds, and the admission of light and air, so renovated the vines that the sons obtained therefrom a bountiful and most profitable crop of the pure fruit thereof. "Blame the culture, not the soil." 'Tis an unweeded garden that grows to seed. "Things rank and gross in nature, possess it, merely."

Albany 1855

Repr. from L. M. Soc. N. Y. 1855.

